

February 19, 2009

Good Afternoon Chairman and Ladies and Gentlemen of the Senate Agriculture Committee:

My name is Juanita Vero, I'm fourth generation living and working on my family's ranch in the Blackfoot Valley. We've had a conservation easement on our ranch since the mid nineties and my 92 year-old grandfather regrets he could not endure the car ride over here to speak to you personally. This bill makes him angry—to be fair, him being angry is nothing new— however, it also makes me angry and indignant that something he has worked his entire life to preserve not for his personal gain but for something much bigger—the greater human and environmental good—could be lost by the stroke of a pen.

This bill does not promote the soul or philosophy of ethical land stewardship. My family, like many others, cares deeply about our land and knows we are only temporary. We don't own the land; we are merely holding it for the next generation. We also know humans aren't trustworthy. Without a perpetual conservation easement how will we know the land we've worked so hard to protect will actually be protected generations from now? The next generation may not care to be part of this land and that's fine. They can sell it but the land will remain intact and protected.

Without a perpetual conservation easement we would dishonor my great grandfather, grandfather and parents' work and vision as well as dishonor the public's trust and investment in our land stewardship. Our land not only provides for our family but it provides for a vast array of plant and animal species. If our land was butchered and developed for someone's short-term monetary gain, the habitat and those species would be lost. "So what?" you might ask. Such arrogance and short sightedness has been humanity's downfall. Montana's intact, connected and complex mountains, forests, rivers and prairies are globally significant, not only for combating climate change and providing species and habitat diversity but also for providing a state of mind that few other places can. When you are stuck in traffic in Anywhere, USA, you don't soothe your mind with the words "North Dakota." The word "Montana," however, is both balm and stimulant, conjuring up all the images that are made possible by perpetual conservation easements.

There are better ways to address unforeseen issues with conservation easements in the future. Removing the word "perpetuity" is irresponsible. Please vote "NO" on SB 478.

Respectfully,



Juanita Vero
8470 Sunset Hill Road
Greenough, MT 59823